



2 December 2015
16:00 to 19:30

ACT Bushfire Council Meeting

Black Mountain Meeting
Rooms
ACT ESA Headquarters

Chair: Kevin Jeffery

Secretariat: Tony Hanson

Attendees:

- Ms Cathy Parsons, Deputy Chair
- Dr Marion Leiba
- Mr Tony Bartlett
- Mr Michael Lonergan
- Mr Steve Angus
- Dr Sarah Ryan
- Ms Natarsha Carney
- Ms Sandra Lauer
- Ms Christine Goonrey

- Mr Andrew Stark, Chief Officer, ACT Rural Fire Service
- Mr Mark Brown, Chief Officer, ACT Fire and Rescue
- Mr Tony Hanson, A/g Manager, Bushfire Coordination and Planning

For Agenda Item 6

- Mr Rick McRae, Risk Analyst, ESA

For Agenda Item 7

- Mr Daniel Iglesias, Director, Parks and Conservation, TAMS

Minutes

Agenda item: 1.0 – Welcome and Apologies

Presenter: Chair

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Mr Mick George and Mr Andrew Joyce.

Agenda item: 2.0 – Disclosure of “Conflict of Interests” of Council Members

Presenter: Chair

No Conflicts of Interest were reported by Council Members. Dr Sarah Ryan has standing note regarding her work with TAMS and will raise any conflicts if they were to emerge.

Agenda item: 3.0 – Acceptance of minutes of previous meeting

Presenter: Chair

Discussion: The minutes from the previous meeting on 4 November 2015, were accepted as a true record.
Moved: Marion Leiba Seconded: Natarsha Carney

Agenda item: 4.0 – Update on action items arising from previous meetings

Presenter: Chair

Review of the ESA Communication Centre

The Chair noted Andrew Joyce was continuing to facilitate a paper for the Commissioner on behalf of Council regarding the Councils feedback on the Comcen Review. Mark Brown explained that the review was being seen as a discussion paper and a starting point for consultation on the way ahead. The recommendations of the review are not necessarily supported by ESA. Six members of Council, Cathy Parsons, Christine Goonrey, Marion Leiba, Sarah Ryan, Natarsha Carney and Sandra Lauer took the opportunity to have a briefing and tour of Comcen prior to the Council Meeting. Council members who attended expressed their gratitude for the excellent briefing provided by William Mundy, ESA Communications Centre Coordinator and noted that they were impressed with the professional operation of the ESA Communications Centre.

Review of the Emergencies Act 2004

Council discussed a number of recommendations of the review that related to Council. This included the positive and negative aspects of introducing defined terms. Tony Bartlett suggested that limiting terms to 8 years does not take into account the benefit of having corporate memory in relation to the 2003 Canberra bushfires. He also indicated that the requirement to consult council on senior appointments to RFS came directly out of the aftermath of the 2003 inquiries and its implementation has not caused any problems over the year. Cathy Parson's suggested experience in major bushfires might be an additional consideration for the legislation. Sarah Ryan cited the positives in relation to defined terms having on the renewal of the Council. Marion Leiba noted that the Council experienced renewal through the addition of new members without having to introduce fixed terms. Tony Hanson reassured Council that the review did not recommend members represent the interests of specific organisations. Council resolved that the Chair write to the Minister raising Council's issues in relation to the Review.

Action Items:

- Council to finalise the response to the Comcen review out of session.
- Council to write to the Minister outlining views regarding the review into the Emergencies Act in relation to defined terms and representation on Council.

Agenda item: 5.0 – Correspondence

Presenter: Chair

- Council Members had received an invitation to the Launch of the ESA Women in Emergency Services Strategy on 4 December 2015. Christine Goonrey noted she would be attending the launch on behalf of Council.
- Council Members noted they had received an invitation from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to provide a written submission on the Auditor General's Report into the Restoration of the Lower Cotter Catchment. Council further discussed this invitation under agenda item 6.

Agenda item: 6.0 – Update on fuel load assessment and fire sciences

Presenters: ESA

The Chair introduced Mr Rick McRae, ESA Risk Analyst who provided an overview of developments in fire behaviour forecast modelling and how the work would benefit fire behavioural analysis. Rick reported on the fuel analysis he was undertaking and noted he was currently updating the 2014 analysis which he had previously provided to Council. The analysis is examining the recovery trajectory in the context of complex fuel types. Rick explained that when we approach a stage of equilibrium following the 2003 Canberra bushfires, normal fire behaviour analysis will be able to resume. The Council had a discussion around mapping a number of introduced species which can be problematic.

Council members explained to Rick how they were wishing to commence exploring how we measure the effectiveness of our mitigation efforts and consider to what level do mitigation activities reduce risk. Rick explained an empirical approach was starting to emerge which presented both opportunity and challenges for fire practitioners. Rick was asked if he could circulate any papers to Council that may be of relevance to this area. It was noted that the upcoming conference on Fire and Fuels in Melbourne in April might be of interest to Council. Rick suggested that Council's deliberations links to the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan (see Section 8 – Adaptive management to provide continuous improvement in bushfire management). Rick provided an overview of his work to develop and test a forecast modelling tool for blow up fire events. Council members thanked Rick for his continuing efforts and presentation and looked forward to his continuing support throughout 2016.

Action Item: Rick McRae to circulate relevant research papers to Council.

Agenda item: 7.0 – Update on the Lower Cotter Catchment

Presenter: TAMS

The Chair introduced Daniel Iglesias, Director of Parks and Conservation from the Territories and Municipal Services Directorate (TAMS) to provide an update on work being undertaken in the Lower Cotter Catchment.

As background, Council undertook a field visit in November 2014 and May 2015 to the Lower Cotter Catchment and provided advice to the Commissioner on the management of the area. The Commissioner provided Council's advice to TAMS and the ACT Auditor-General provided a Report on the *Restoration of the Lower Cotter Catchment* in May 2015. The Standing Committee on Public Accounts wrote to the Bushfire Council in late November calling for submissions on the Auditor-General's report by 4 February 2016.

Daniel provided an overview of the additional funding provided in the 2015/16 Budget for land management in the Lower Cotter Catchment and the governance arrangements in place to implement the Auditor-General's recommendations which is through the Director General's Water Group. The governance arrangements ensured that there was a focus on strategic issues and visibility at senior levels within the ACT Government. In relation to Council's advice to the Commissioner regarding the management of the area, Daniel explained the Auditor General's report contained 12 recommendations and number 10 referred to the management of fire trails.

Daniel provided an overview of work being undertaken which included identifying and zoning the catchment into areas for dedicated risk assessment and development of a management plan. The soil, vegetation and risk factors were being considered in relation to treatment options. Daniel provided an overview of current works regarding trail works and twittering. Two positions were in the process of being recruited to support the risk and management planning needed to be undertaken.

Tony Bartlett welcomed Daniel's update and explained TAMS approach was consistent with Council's recommended advice to the ESA Commissioner. Council agreed that they would write to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts explaining the field visits undertaken by Council to the Lower Cotter Catchment and that the approach currently being implemented by TAMS is consistent with Council's formal advice to the Commissioner in mid 2015.

On a separate note, Daniel provided an overview to Council on recent amendments to planning regulations which streamlines the approval approach for routine bushfire management works. The amendments would save significant time whilst ensuring environmental values are retained. Daniel also provided an overview the development of a draft plan of management for the Molonglo River Reserve by Dr Sarah Ryan which would be circulated for comment shortly.

The Council Members thanked Daniel for his update and outlined the importance that Council Members place on TAMS attending Council Meetings to provide updates on bushfire management activities. In addition, Council had recently outlined to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services the professionalism with which TAMS undertakes its burning programs and highlighted Council's support for TAMS Indigenous programs. Council requested Daniel to pass on Council's thanks to the staff within TAMS for the dedication and continuing efforts to bushfire management and mitigation in the Territory.

Action Item: Executive Officer to draft letter for Chair in relation to the Standing Committee into Public Accounts consideration of the Auditor General's report into the restoration of the Lower Cotter Catchment to reflect the sentiment expressed by Council at the December Council meeting.

Agenda item: 8.0 – Overview of Elevated Bushfire Danger Plan

Presenter: Chief Officer RFS

Andrew Stark, RFS CO provided an overview of the Elevated Bushfire Danger Plan which is a specific hazard sub plan of the ACT Emergency Plan.

The Plan was first developed in 2010 and details the arrangements for a coordinated all agencies approach to Elevated Fire Danger conditions in the ACT, and provides guidance to ACT Government Directorates and Agencies on activities that they can undertake to mitigate risk during days of elevated fire danger.

The Plan identifies facilities to be closed or have modified activities under Elevated Fire Danger. The original plan focused on education and health facilities. Other standard arrangements are in place for Total Fire Bans including Park and Road Closures by TAMS.

The plan assists Directorates develop their own operational plans in relation to closure, relocation and modification of facilities or services.

A major change within the revised 2015 version of the Plan is the inclusion of a 'Review of Planned Events' group in the preparation for forecast Elevated Fire Danger conditions. The role of this group is to review and assess the risks associated with any events planned to take place at identified sites, as well as any Major Events occurring, during the period of elevated fire danger.

Council discussed independent schools and their closure policies. Council were concerned that there any blanket closure policies for schools not in bushfire prone areas might not appropriately weigh potential negative impacts of their closure. Council suggested that ACT Government continue to dialogue with the independent schools to ensure that their policies are appropriate for the risks that they face and consider the impacts and consequences of their decisions.

Agenda item: 10.0 – Finalisation of the 2016 Business Plan

Presenter: Chair

Council made a number of amendments to Council's draft 2016 Business Plan and agreed on the following tentative meeting agenda topics.

Feb-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross Border Arrangements (RFS) (SBMP 2&3) • Update on Review into Community Fire Units (F&R) (SBMP 9)
Mar-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of Bushfire Prone Areas (EPD + ESA) (SBMP 10&11) • Update on community awareness and warning activities (SBMP 9)
Apr-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of new technology for weather forecasting and fire behaviour (ESA + BOM) (SBMP 3&8) • New approaches to identifying priorities for reducing fuel hazards and monitoring and evaluating risk reduction (ESA) (SBMP 8) • Overview of lessons learnt – inquiries, reviews and reports (SBMP 8)
May-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome of strategic review of fuel hazards and road network in Lower Cotter (SBMP 6&7) • Update on Indigenous Fire Management Program
Jun-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2016/17 Bushfire Operational Plans - Review of all Plans by Council for ESA Commissioner (SBMP 5 & 6) + out of session workshop if required
Jul-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approaches to prescribed burns to minimise escapes (SBMP 8) • Overview of volunteer brigades in relation to recruitment, retention, succession planning, mentoring, training and competencies. (SBMP 2&3)
Aug-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of achievements of the TAMS Bushfire Operational Plan in 2014/15 (SBMP 1 & 6) • Aviation Arrangements and Developments (SBMP 3)
Sep-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seasonal Outlook for 2016/17 • Production of Annual Preparedness Statement for the Minister • Annual pre-season briefing on Preparedness by Rural Fire Service
Oct-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burning Program for 2017
Nov-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contingency meeting to allow for slippage
Dec-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2016 in Review - Planning for 2017 • Verbal Report to Commissioner on scope and effectiveness of SBMP as required by <i>Emergencies Act</i>

Agenda item: 9.0 – Other Business

Presenter:

Preparedness Update

Andrew Stark provided an overview of preparations for the season. Helicopters had commenced operation 3 weeks early and the new Hercules DC10 had been tested at Canberra Airport. The Hercules could provide 10,000 litres a load and 2 aircraft were available from Richmond NSW and 2 from Avalon Victoria. Andrew provided an update on the re-certification recently completed and the finalization of a basic firefighters course. Parks would be conducting a crew leader program over the summer period.

Council participation in 2016 Conferences

The Chair sought the Commissioners support for Council Members to attend the Fire & Fuels conference in April 2016 at Melbourne and AFAC Conference in August 2016 in Brisbane. The Executive Officer would follow up with the Commissioner in financial support towards this participation including the consideration of an appropriate expression of interest process.

Action Item: Executive Officer to confirm Commissioner's support for a Council Member to attend upcoming conferences in 2016 and consider a suitable EOI process.

Agenda item: *11.0 – Words of Appreciation and Next Meeting*

Presenter: Chair

The Chair thanked the Tony Hanson, Executive Officer to Council for his support of Council throughout 2015 and acknowledged Mark Brown's contribution as the new Chief Officer for ACT Fire and Rescue in 2015. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday 3 February 2016 and the Chair wished everyone best wishes for the festive season.

Closing: The meeting closed at 19:30pm.